Making Connections

August 14, 2024

Introducing Making Connections Bi-weekly Series by Deb Andres, M.S. CFCS-HDFS.

Hello, readers! I am excited to serve as the K-State Research & Extension Family & Consumer Sciences agent for the Flint Hills District (Chase and Morris counties.) The alphabet soup behind my name is a summary of my educational credentials: I have a both a Bachelor’s (vocational Home Economics Education) and Master’s (Family Studies and Human Development) degree from Kansas State University and I hold a specialization as a Certified Family and Consumer Sciences professional in the area of Human Development and Family Studies. Basically, I love working with individuals, families, and communities to improve the human condition where people live, work, and play.

My task as your FCS Extension Agent is to provide in-person and printed educational programming, serve as a resource for all things home and family, and provide targeted services such as Medicare counseling, nutrition education, chronic disease prevention, financial resource management, balancing family and work roles, and equipping families with tools to develop and maintain strong relationships while maintaining healthy boundaries.

In addition, writing educational and insightful research-based articles is not only part of my work, it is something I greatly enjoy. You will find my first Making Connections article below.

With summer break having come to an end, many families are coping with significant schedule changes to their weekdays. A higher level of organization and social skills are required for the school setting compared to the often more easy-going ones of summer.

Encouraging children and teens to stay organized and responsible with their time and activities is only the first step. It is also important to have conversations about social tips that will help in their relationships with friends, teachers and other employees at the school. Here are two things Dr. David Schramm with Utah State University’s Extension Service suggests parents and guardians should discuss with their children as they head back to school:

**Make time to be kind.** One of the best ways to make friends and a good first impression at school is to be kind. There are three simple things children of all ages can do – the three S’s – smile, serve and share. A smile is the first thing most people will see and remember. It shows friendliness, warmth and openness. Serving others in small ways will also open doors to friendship. A simple compliment or grabbing something that has fallen on the floor for someone can work wonders. Sharing paper, crayons or a treat can help as well. Parents can model these principles and invite their children to be kind and respectful to everyone.

**It’s good to be grateful.**Just like with kindness, gratitude shows others you are open, thoughtful and humble. Children can give thanks to anyone they meet, from the bus driver, to the gym teacher, to the principal. They all work hard and need to hear expressions of thanks. Letters, texts and sticky notes are simple ways to show gratitude to others. Cultivating gratitude in children starts with parents’ willingness to express sincere thanks to others, especially their children.

As a Family and Consumer Sciences professional and former teacher, I have a heightened awareness of the importance of communication between parents and school staff to ensure that our children are adjusting to the school environment, following the guidelines of each classroom they are in, finding ways to be both cognitively and socially engaged, and keeping up with schoolwork. If you haven’t taken the time to introduce yourself to your child(ren)’s building principal and classroom teachers, I encourage you to do that. Don’t wait for them to contact you as they have many more children that they are responsible for than you are. Even if it isn’t realistic for you to reach out today, make it a priority to do it in the first week to ten days of school. Establishing that connection early in the school year can pave the way for a strong teacher-parent support system for your child(ren)’s intellectual, social, and emotional development and ultimately, their success in school.

*Making connections for youth, families, and communities – Deb Andres*

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August 28, 2024

Parenting in the School Groove

No doubt, if you are a parent or caregiver of children, you know how challenging it can be to help them transition back to school. The change can be tough for the whole family, but by being intentional, you can help the adjustment run smoothly.

Last time, I shared 2 tips from Dr. David Schramm with Utah State University’s Extension Service that can help the first few weeks of school go more smoothly. Below are a couple more suggestions from Dr. Schramm. He notes that modeling and encouraging kindness as well as expressing gratitude helps with both school and home relationships.

With a couple of weeks of school under our belts, I want to focus on the importance of **noticing and appreciating the good in each day**. Children are often bombarded with negativity, sometimes from the beginning of the day. From teasing and quizzes, to homework and bad hair days, our brains are wired to focus and dwell on the tough things that happen. When your children come home from school, ask about the best part of their day and don’t settle with the “I don’t know” or “nothing” responses they may give. Dinnertime or right before bedtime, offer to have a quick chat about the day’s positive points.

Another suggestion for keeping the first few weeks school run smoothly is for adults to **be quick to forgive** their youth. New schedules and routines can bring new challenges and stress. Being patient with children is always important, but even more so when they are dealing with change and transition. When you keep your tone of voice low and are quick to forgive, it helps teach children to be quick to forgive, as well. Similarly, teach your kiddos to be patient with others and quick to forgive offenses, including those from friends and teachers. After all, it’s transition time for them, too!

Parenting is no easy task and certainly requires us to bring our best game each and every day. By reminding ourselves of some tried-and-true relationship skills like these offered by Dr. Schramm, we can make both home and school a great place for kids to grow.

*Making Connections for youth, families, and communities – Best regards, Deb*